

# F.O.R. Families Program

## FY2009 Statewide Summary Report

Division for Perinatal Early Childhood and Special Health Needs  
Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition  
MA Department of Public Health  
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## **BACKGROUND**

F.O.R. (Follow-up Outreach Referral) Families is a home visiting program for families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. The program goal is to improve families' access to appropriate resources and help families make the transition from homelessness to stable permanent housing by identifying and addressing barriers to attaining and maintaining self-sufficiency and family well-being.

The F.O.R. Families program is implemented by the Department of Public Health (DPH) and funded through an Interagency Service Agreement (ISA) with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). From 1999 -2009 F.O.R. Families was funded through an ISA with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA ), but this ISA was transferred to DHCD when they assumed responsibility for the Emergency Assistance Program and Homelessness Unit.

Originally conceived in the context of welfare reform, F.O.R. Families was implemented to provide follow-up, outreach, and referral services to families in the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program who were no longer eligible for benefits, or those in the process of transitioning off the welfare program. The broad range of services and programs as well as the flexibility of the DPH made this government agency the ideal place to house F.O.R. Families.

## **POPULATION SERVED**

Home visiting services are available for the families receiving Emergency Assistance (EA) because they are homeless and living in a shelter or hotel, they refuse shelter placement, or they are terminated from a shelter. Families enter the F.O.R. Families program through direct referrals from DHCD.

## **HOME VISITING SERVICES**

Home Visitors are experienced human service professionals with extensive public health, community health, and child welfare experience. Home visitors conduct family assessments and coordinate services for families with community-based programs. Referrals and services are based upon families' needs, which are assessed in several sub-categories within five domains: housing; health; food security and nutrition; family economics; and social, community, and family support.

The F.O.R. Families home visitors coordinate needed services with an array of community-based programs and mainstream services such as WIC, Early Intervention, primary health care, domestic violence and substance abuse treatment as well as the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) when appropriate. Home visitors also provide information about school enrollment options, food, clothing, transportation services, counseling families on prioritizing their needs, and other support services relevant to the mission of assisting families in transition move to more stable housing.

## **METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

These descriptive data are representative only of the homeless clients with at least one point of contact with a F.O.R. Families staff member providing service in fiscal 2009 (July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009). These data may not reflect the characteristics of the overall homeless family population in Massachusetts. In FY09, economic and social factors contributed to a rise in the number of families experiencing a crisis and losing, or at risk for losing stable housing. F.O.R. Families responds to either DTA's or DCHD's needs for services. During an economic downturn, the program is asked to serve those families most impacted by the economic crisis. In 2009, this crisis contributed to large numbers of families losing their housing and being temporarily sheltered in hotels and motels (2,523 clients in FY09 alone). The types of contacts and referrals provided by the program's home visitors reflect the crises that families experience. A difference in the value of specific data elements this year compared to previous years may simply reflect a change in the population participating in/referred into the program.

Analyzable program data is that which is collected on a simple computerized form that is used upon intake of a client. Since this database mostly collects characteristics of the population served, only limited inferences can be made about the impact of the program and the progress made by its clients over the course of their service. Furthermore, since families may move out of temporary housing quickly, it can be difficult to track their progress over time. Additionally, a high rate of missing data contributes to the apparently fluctuating population size across different variables among F.O.R. Families' 3,169 FY09 clients. Participants with missing values for data elements are not included in the analysis of those data elements. Total numbers of missing values by demographic category may be found in Table 1. Excluded participants (i.e. those with missing values) may be different from the individuals with complete information. Consequently, the population that is included in some analyses may not be representative of the total population that has participated in the program.

In this report, "region" is defined by the home visitors' region of origin rather than the region where the clients are placed. This is important to consider in the context of the needs of the program as home visitors are sometimes asked to cover areas of the state outside of the region where they are "seated," as is warranted by the needs of the population.

Eliminating homelessness is a stated objective of the MA legislature and is an important and worthy public goal for the Commonwealth. The intent of this report is to outline the work and understand the needs of the F.O.R. Families program through a demographic data analysis of the clients it serves. However, given the program's current crisis-oriented mission, a demographic analysis of the program (and any subsequent outcomes drawn from it) may look very different year-to-year depending on the current priority clients. An example of this is the current hotel/motel-based client focus reflected in this year's report which not only garners the lion's share of referrals into the program but also potentially plays into the current finding of overall reduced time-in-program

(p.15) as hotel/motel stays are only meant to be temporary placements until family shelter becomes available.

**Key Program-wide findings for FY09 (1July2008 -30June2009) include:**

- 82% of clients were referred into the program from temporary hotel or motel housing. This referral type did not exist in FY08.
- Over a quarter of clients (26%) were served by home visitors based in the Northeast region (more than from any other EO HHS region). The Northeast, Southeast, West, and Boston regions were the largest regions. The Central and Metro West regional staff had far fewer clients.
- About half (45%) of clients had at less than a high school diploma, and about a quarter (24%) of client had some post-high school education.
- More than half of heads of household were 28 years old or younger. The greatest portion of this group (27% overall) were between 19 and 23 years old. Less than 2% of clients overall were 18 years old or younger.
- Half of clients had one child residing with them, and more than 75% overall had two or fewer children.
- 92% of heads of households were female.
- Participants, on average, tended to stay in the program a shorter amount of time in FY2009 when compared to a 5 -year average of duration of time in the program (FY05 - FY09). This is in line with expectation described above vis -à-vis the large numbers of families sheltered in short -term hotel/motel placements.

All data in this report is sourced from the F.O.R. Families data for the fiscal year 2009 (July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009).

This report was prepared for the F.O.R. Families program by Chris Borger (Office of Data Translation). Please address all inquiries and requests for copies of this report to the Program Director, Melissa Marlowe ([melissa.marlowe@state.ma.us](mailto:melissa.marlowe@state.ma.us)).

**Table 1: Demographics of F.O.R. Families Clients Population \***

<b>Client Distribution</b>	<b>N=2,995</b>	<b>%</b>
Boston	663	22.14%
Central	304	10.15%
Metro West	123	4.11%
Northeast	774	25.84%
Southeast	570	19.03%
West	561	18.73%
(data missing**)	(174)	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>N=2,935</b>	
Male	241	8.21%
Female	2694	91.79%
(data missing**)	(234)	
<b>Age</b>	<b>N=1,672</b>	
under 24	469	28.05%
24-28	408	24.40%
29-33	270	16.15%
34-38	229	13.70%
39+	296	17.70%
(data missing**)	(1,497)	
<b>Race</b>	<b>N=2,559</b>	
Asian/Pacific Islander	23	0.90%
Black, Non-Hispanic	719	28.10%
Hispanic	946	36.97%
Native American	13	0.51%
Other, Non-Hispanic	167	6.53%
White, Non-Hispanic	691	27.00%
(data missing**)	(610)	
<b>Education Level</b>	<b>N=2,173</b>	
Any post-high school education	525	24.16%
High school diploma	672	30.92%
Less than high school diploma	976	44.91%
(data missing**)	(996)	
<b>Source of Referral</b>	<b>N=3,083</b>	
Shelter	371	12.03%
Shelter to Housing	9	0.29%
Intake Center	35	1.14%
Refused Shelter	<5	n/a
800 Line	19	0.62%
TAO Special Request	48	1.56%
Hotel/Motel	2,523	81.84%
Presumptive EA	<5	n/a
Rapid Re-housing	76	2.47%
(data missing**)	(86)	
<b>Number of children</b>	<b>N=2579</b>	
Pregnant/no children	103	3.99%
1 child	1,271	49.28%
2 children	704	27.30%
3+ children	501	19.43%
(data missing**)	(590)	

\*N=3,169, this represents all clients (including those with missing data); differences in the counts of demographic categories reflect omission of missing values from each category's client count.

\*\*clients with missing data are not included in percentages or in subsequent descriptions of the data.

## Home Visitor Contacts and Referrals

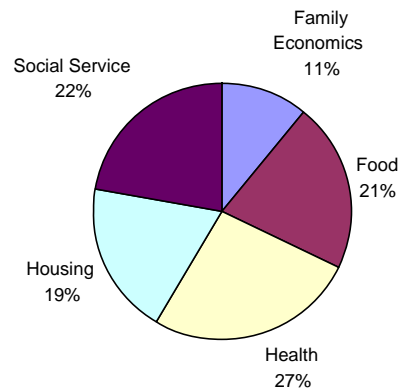
The F.O.R. Families home visitors made a total of 28,722 client and agency contacts during FY09. 67.3% of those contacts (19,326) were direct client contacts. The remaining 9,396 contacts (letters or "other contacts") were either case conferences or contacts with supporting agencies.

Overall, and among direct client contacts, 14,898 successful contacts were made. This represents 71.3% of the 20,901 attempted client contacts.

**Table 2: Total Home Visitor Contacts \***

Total Contacts	N=28,722	%
Home Visits	12,942	45.06
Letter Contact	1,575	5.48
Telephone Contact	6,384	22.23
Other Contact	7,821	27.23

**Figure 1 : Distribution of Referral Type**



Health referrals (including substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health) garnered the largest share of referrals at 27% overall. Food, housing, and social services were next (all falling between 19% and 22%). Family economics was the least common referral at 11%.

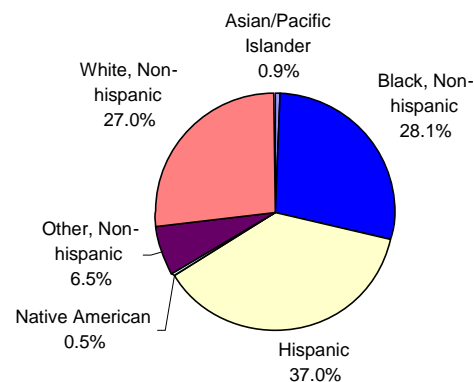
Absolute numbers of referrals can be found in the appendix

## Program Demographics

The race/ethnicity of clients in the F.O.R. Families was dominated by three groups: Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, and white non-Hispanic. These three groups made up 91% of clients. The largest of these was Hispanic, comprising 37% of clients, followed by black non-Hispanic and white non-Hispanic with 28.1% (719 clients) and 27% (691 clients), respectively. The remaining two "non-other" groups, Native American and Asian & Pacific Islander, totaled 36 of the program's 2,559 racially-identified clients.

Absolute numbers of clients' race/ethnicity can be found Table 1.

**Figure 2: Overall Distribution of Race/Ethnicity**



## Program Demographics (cont'd)

Viewing head of household age, those under the age of 28 made up more than half of the program. Clients under the age of 24 made up 28% of all clients in F.O.R. Families who had an age recorded. 24 -28 year olds represented about a quarter of all clients with a recorded age. The remaining half of clients was nearly evenly split between 29-33 years (16%), 34-38 (14%), and 39 years and older (18%). It is important to note when using age group to create a picture of the F.O.R. Families population that close to half of clients has a missing value for age/date of birth

Figure 3: Overall Age Distribution (in years)

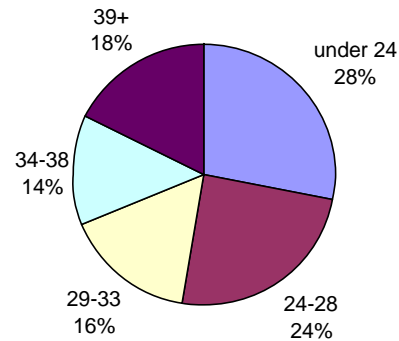
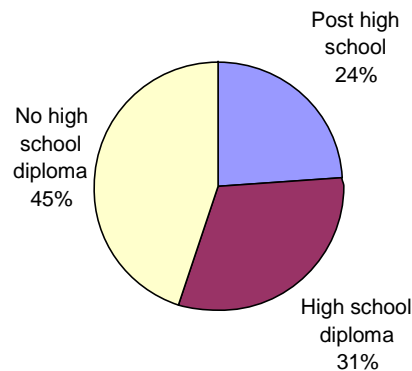


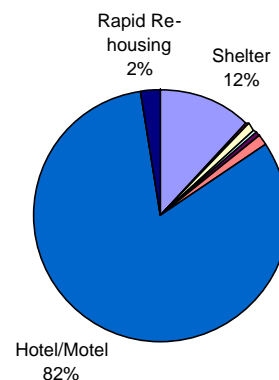
Figure 4: Overall Distribution of Client Education

Looking at self-reported education level, more than half of clients in the program had at least a high school diploma. This group of 1,197 clients makes up 55% of the program's household heads. 672 clients (31%) had a high school diploma as their highest level of education, and 525 clients (24% of the program population that had identified their education level) had at least some post-high school diploma education.



Hotel and motel referrals made up the vast majority (82%, or 2,523 referrals) of client referrals into the program. The next most common referral source, shelter referrals, comprised only 12% (371 referrals) of the total. The remaining sources—including rapid re-housing—were very limited relative to the size of the hotel/motel referral population. The non-hotel, non-shelter referrals (represented by the thinnest slices in the pie chart in addition to Shelter and Rapid Re-housing) totaled 189 total referrals (6% of all referrals).

Figure 5: Overall Distribution of Referral Source

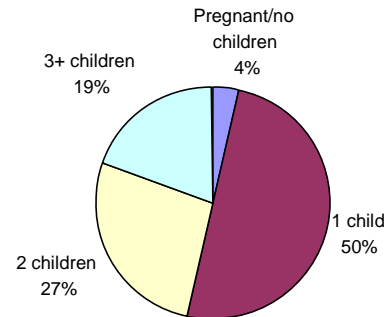




## Program Demographics (cont'd)

**Figure 6: Overall Distribution of Number of Children**

Half of client households had only one child, and just over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of households, overall, had 1 or 2 children. The remaining quarter of households had three or more children (19%) or had an expectant mother without any other children (4%). Of note, these numbers may not be accounting for older children that don't live with the parent(s).



## Time in Program Analysis

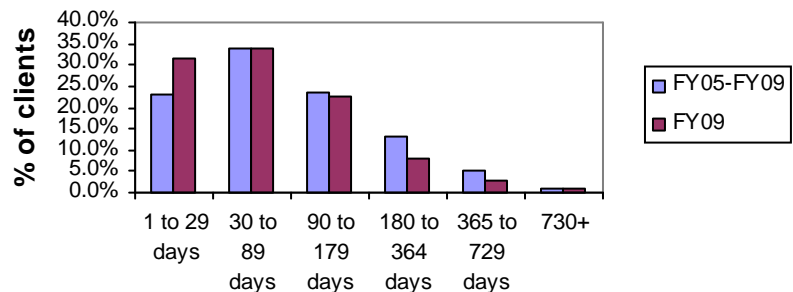
Analysis was done to determine the trends in the average duration that F.O.R. Families program participants remained in the program in FY2009. These averages were qualitatively compared to a 5-year average (FY05-FY09; 1Jul04-30Jun09). Time in program was viewed in discrete, independent time-interval groups, and in cumulative time-interval groups.

In both FY2009 and in the 5-year interval, the 30-89 day group had the largest number of clients (34% in both breakouts). However, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest group in the 5-year average was 90-179 days (3-6 months), in FY2009 the group of clients that were in the program less than a month was almost as large as the 30-89 day group (32% v. 34%, respectively). This indicates a trend in the last year toward overall shorter stays in F.O.R. Families which is entirely consistent with the program's priority population being those residing in hotels/motels (i.e. short-term placements). This trend can also be seen in the longer time-interval groups, with a smaller proportion in FY2009 for the 6-month to 1-year & 1-2 year groups when compared to the respective 5-year average. The 2-year+ group is a similar but insignificant 1% both in FY2009 and in the FY05-09 cohorts.

**Table 3: Time in Program**

FY09 (N=2354)		
Time Interval	N	%
1 to 29 days	743	31.6%
30 to 89 days	798	33.9%
90 to 179 days	536	22.8%
180 to 364 days	187	7.9%
365 to 729 days	66	2.8%
730+	24	1.0%
FY05-FY09 (N=5205)		
	N	%
1 to 29 days	1,191	22.9%
30 to 89 days	1,758	33.8%
90 to 179 days	1,234	23.7%
180 to 364 days	692	13.3%
365 to 729 days	278	5.3%
730+	52	1.0%

**Figure 7: Time in Program**



## Conclusions

This report is the first comprehensive review of the program's data since the last database reconfiguration in 2004. As a result of the gaps in data ascertainment, a comprehensive database re-engineering was undertaken by senior program staff. A new database (including a totally new data entry tool) was created and launched in July 2010. The new database entry system includes many safeguards to assure more accurate and complete data entry and adds safeguards to restrict access of the clients' personal information. We expect these steps to make our data more useful and to increase the privacy of our clients' sensitive information.

During the recession Massachusetts saw an increase in the number of homeless families due to job loss, lack of eviction prevention resources, and the high rate of foreclosures. As the number of homeless families grew, the program's focus shifted in September 2008 to serving the homeless families residing in hotels. Prior to this, the state has not had to use hotels as temporary shelter since 2004. Homelessness threatens the health and well being of all family members, and many of the families have a limited support network. The F.O.R. Families Program helps to stabilize the family through support, advocacy, and identifying and addressing their unmet needs to attain and maintain self-sufficiency. Many families need assistance with basic life skills including budgeting, parenting, setting priorities, maintaining an apartment and planning for a crisis. Home visitors also connect clients to mainstream resources to address those needs.

Previously, families remained with the program for longer periods of time. However, due to the high caseloads in motels the program was unable to work with the families as they transitioned into permanent housing or temporary shelter. The F.O.R. Families home visitors spent between 60-80% of their work time in the field and this intensity of outreach is reflected in high rate of attempted direct client contacts were successful (71.3%). As a program within the Department of Public Health, a major focus of the home visit is to address health related concerns and includes referrals for substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health services. The health domain generated 27% of the referrals made by the home visitors. Since the Department of Housing and Community Development has taken over as the funding source and the program has adopted a "housing first" focus, we expect that in the coming years the family economics and housing categories may show increased referrals. By creating a new database we are trying to collect more reliable data on the families we serve. This will assist us in targeting our interventions and evaluating outcomes in the future.

## APPENDIX

Total Home Visitor Referrals by Region\*

	Boston	Central	Metro West	Northeast	Southeast	West	Total
Family Economics	311	38	17	95	185	27	673
Food	285	59	22	156	272	475	1,269
Health	236	117	32	190	541	458	1,574
Housing	332	139	51	156	405	92	1,175
Social Service	310	92	32	169	422	307	1,332
Total	1,474	445	154	766	1,825	1,359	6,023

Total Number of Clients by Race/Ethnicity and Region\*

	Boston	Central	Metro West	Northeast	Southeast	West	Total
black, non-Hisp	284	33	40	115	156	76	704
Hispanic	203	49	34	226	104	277	893
white, non-Hisp	106	77	22	195	190	94	684
Asian/PI	6	<5	0	12	<5	<5	23
Native Am	<5	0	<5	0	8	<5	13
other, non-Hisp	24	32	11	22	45	28	162
Total	626	192	108	570	505	478	2,479

Total Number of Clients by Age and Region\*

	Boston	Central	Metro West	Northeast	Southeast	West	Total
under 24 years	157	34	23	72	129	49	464
24-28 years	101	35	19	63	106	79	403
29-33 years	74	33	9	35	73	42	266
34-38 years	78	16	7	35	55	36	227
39+ years	92	24	11	44	67	55	293
Total	502	142	69	249	430	261	1,653

Number of Clients by Education Level and Region\*

	Boston	Central	Metro West	Northeast	Southeast	West	Total
Any post-HS	165	27	24	77	145	82	520
High school diploma	194	43	37	123	142	128	667
No HS diploma	205	74	42	264	185	197	967
Total	564	144	103	464	472	407	2,154

Number of Clients by Number of Children and Region\*

	Boston	Central	Metro West	Northeast	Southeast	West	Total
Pregnant/no children	28	18	<5	22	27	<5	101
1 child	319	84	60	317	258	199	1,237
2 children	175	45	25	182	130	128	685
3+ children	108	35	17	101	111	114	486
Total	630	182	104	622	526	445	2,509

\*variations from the numbers reported on Table 1 are the result of missing values across two data fields

## APPENDIX

### Total Home Visitor Referrals, Total Program

<b>Total Referrals</b>	<b>N=6062</b>		
Family Economics	675	11.1%	
Food	1279	21.1%	
Health	1586	26.2%	
Housing	1180	19.5%	
Social Services	1342	22.1%	